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SUBJECT: GIMME SHELTER: STRAYS FIND NEW HOME IN MOSCOW

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¶1. SUMMARY: Strays roaming Moscow now have an upscale alternative. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) recently opened a new Stray Dog and Cat clinic in northern Moscow that is intended to work in tandem with an existing mobile vet clinic. This represents the first such combination of mobile and stationary surgical facilities dedicated to animals in Russia. Stray dogs continue to be a gnawing and increasingly visible problem in Moscow, so it is not surprising that city authorities are strong advocates for this IFAW project. END SUMMARY.

Background: Stray Dogs in Moscow

¶2. By rough estimates, Moscow is home to some 40,000 stray dogs. Permanent fixtures outside almost every metro station, packs of these animals are a common sight throughout the city. Many of the strays suffer from inhumane treatment, hunger, and disease. Dog attacks occur regularly. Although Moscow authorities officially switched from a catch-and-kill policy to spay/neutering four years ago in a move towards more humane animal management, significant shortcomings remain in the city's efforts to control the population. Official policy states that all stray dogs should be sterilized, inserted with a microchip recording their processing, kept in a shelter for 10 days, and then released (at a cost of 4,500 rubles, or roughly \$175 dollars, per dog). However, the population of strays in Moscow has continued to grow in recent years -- suggesting faulty sterilization methods or, more likely, lax implementation of official policy.

New Stray Animal Clinic Opens in Northern Moscow

¶3. The future may be less bleak, however. IFAW officially opened its new Stray Dog and Cat clinic, the Community Led Animal Welfare (CLAW) center, in northern Moscow on April 25. EST attended the opening ceremony, which drew more than 80 guests -- including veterinarians, journalists, and state officials. Speakers at the event included Oleg Mitvol, the Deputy Director of Rosprirodnadzor (the Federal Nature Management Supervision Service), Vera Stepanenko, the Head of the Environment Commission of the Moscow City Duma, and Fred O'Regan, President and CEO of IFAW. The administrative head of Koptevo, the municipal district where the new center is located, also attended the event and praised its positive community impact.

¶4. Although there are currently eight animal shelters operating in northern Moscow, IFAW's new CLAW center is the first in the city to focus on comprehensive community based animal care -- promoting public education and working to find sustainable homes for stray animals. The center will provide spay/neutering services, vaccinations and other basic veterinary care for stray animals and

pets of low-income Moscow residents, training for Russian veterinarians on the latest surgical methods, and community education on animal treatment and welfare. The center, which can accommodate up to 50 animals at a time, is equipped with a large dog training and exercise area, new dog pens, modern surgical facilities, conference/class space for educational instruction, and a specially equipped mini bus for transporting the animals. The center's surgical facilities will be among the first in Moscow to use only approved medications (illicit drugs are widely used for veterinary surgery throughout Russia due to the high costs of officially approved veterinary narcotics) and are outfitted with gas anesthesia -- a rarity in Russia and an important educational resource for animal professionals.

Mobile Vet Clinic Provides Additional Capacity

15. IFAW's mobile vet clinic (TESS), established five years ago and the first of its kind in Moscow, will work in tandem with the new CLAW shelter. This represents the first such combination of mobile and stationary surgery facilities dedicated to animals in Russia. A fully equipped veterinary lab also outfitted with gas anesthesia, the mobile clinic is set up to provide spay/neutering services as well as basic veterinary care. Over the past five years the mobile clinic has treated more than 12,000 animals and was featured on a NTV television special. Mobile vet services are a primary component of IFAW's international efforts because they provide the flexibility to target animal overpopulation and provide animal welfare education where it is most needed, often in low income areas. IFAW hopes this arrangement will serve as a model for Moscow and other regions of Russia.

Community Education is Key to Clinic's Efforts

16. Community education is an integral component of IFAW's efforts to change public attitudes toward animal welfare, care, and treatment. In addition to its vaccination and sterilization duties,

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the new CLAW center will serve as a hub for community animal welfare education programs and expanded professional training programs. IFAW plans to educate schoolchildren and community members about proper animal care, provide information on keeping pets in city apartments, train veterinarians and animal management specialists, and promote the purchase of dog breeds known to make good pets. The TESS mobile clinic provides the additional capability of traveling directly to veterinary clinics or high need communities, where direct animal care can be combined with civic education. The mobile clinic currently educates veterinarians and interns associated with Agrosystem - 2, a subsidiary of the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy in Moscow.

City Authorities Provide Essential Support

17. IFAW financed the bulk of the new shelter's construction costs and will fund its day-to-day operations, but Moscow city authorities provided crucial support. They contributed limited construction funds, supplied the electricity and water connections for the new building, and most significantly provided a plot of land for the center in a specially zoned nature area. Although the current lease is for only one year rather than 49 as expected, in a side conversation at the opening ceremony Oleg Mitvol asked Masha Vorontsova, Director of IFAW Russia, to draft a letter requesting resolution of the situation and promised that he would personally talk with Mayor Luzhkov to secure the long-term lease. This encouraging collaboration among the administration of the northern Koptevo district of Moscow, the administrators of specialized city territories, and the ecological, veterinarian, and sanitary services of Moscow reflects strong support from government officials and city administrators for IFAW's community outreach programs.

Comment

18. The opening of the new shelter bodes well for Moscow's nascent efforts to manage its stray animal population. Muscovites have always been dog-lovers (NOTE: The smaller the apartment, the larger the dog. END NOTE) but they have been slow to adopt humane methods to control the burgeoning stray population. The increasing number of pet owners in the city reflects the growing middle class, which means the new center's community outreach programs are well positioned to generate further grassroots support for humane animal care. Vera Stepanenko observed that "many, but not all" of her colleagues at the City Duma share her views on the importance of humane animal treatment. This underscores both the substantial government support IFAW has already generated and the ongoing importance of its civic education and community outreach efforts.

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